

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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YOUNG MR. NIGHTINGALE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "HOBSON'S CHOICE," &c.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE DAY AFTER THE FAIR.

WILD thoughts occurred to me of rushing off somewhere—I knew not whither—in quest of Rosetta; of taking up the pursuit where Mauleverer and Diavolo had abandoned it. But what could I do? It was all too hopeless. And yet I felt furious at the thought of remaining idle while she was in peril. For I could not doubt that she was in peril. She was missing for certain. If she had fled alone it was bad enough; so young as she was, so fair, so poor, so helpless, so inexperienced as she needs must be in the world's ways, temptations, dangers. But if she had gone with Lord Overbury, had been lured away by him! I could not bear the thought. It was too terrible.

It was clear I could do nothing, but hope that, as Mauleverer had suggested, all would prove to be a mistake, that she would be found at Dripford on his return.

Yet to think that all the time I had wasted loitering idly about the town, this had happened! I had been close at hand, and yet again had never stirred on her behalf, to protect her against her enemies, perhaps against herself. It was maddening.

My pony left to his own devices—for I was too much preoccupied to heed much what became of him or of myself—carried me safely home. As we mounted the shoulder of the down that sheltered the hollow in which the farm-house was built, I noted that a light was burning in the kitchen.

I rang the stable bell and roused a sleepy servant, resigning the pony to his charge. I then entered the kitchen. My mother

was seated by the fire, her knitting in her lap.

"How late you are, Duke! I feared something had happened."

"I was detained, I should say perhaps that I stayed, to see the fair by night."

"Reuben has been home hours since."

"And my uncle is satisfied?"

"Quite satisfied. But he is suffering a little. He complains of his rheumatism. He went to bed early. But he seemed pleased the lambs had sold so well."

"It was all Reuben's doing. I had no share in it. He told you so, perhaps?"

"No, he said nothing of that."

"It's true though. I missed him somehow. The place was in such a whirl."

"It matters little, Duke, so that you're home again, safe and well. How your hand burns! You're not ill, my boy?"

"No. I'm well enough, only—Pardon me, mother; I did not mean to speak so roughly."

"You're tired, Duke, that's all. No wonder. It's been a long day, and all's been very new and strange to you. A good night's rest——"

"Mother," I said suddenly, "I met Lord Overbury in Dripford."

"Indeed!" She started, and it seemed to me that she had turned pale. But the light was not strong; the candle on the kitchen table was burning dimly, and the fire was sinking into a dull, flameless red.

"He knew you?" she asked, rather faintly.

"Yes. He invited me to lunch with him."

"It was kindly meant, perhaps," she said with some effort apparently. "But—you like him, Duke?"

"No."

I was about to add that I hated him. I

checked myself, however. She looked at me curiously.

"It is as well, perhaps. He is your uncle's landlord—for great part of the farm. But, you are not equals, Duke. Your positions are widely different. You cannot associate with him on fair terms. It is not for me to judge him, or to speak disrespectfully of him. He is——" she hesitated.

"A nobleman," I said, rather bitterly.

"Yes. And you are—my son. There can be nothing in common between you."

"You know him, mother?"

"I have not seen him for many years."

And she added after a pause, "I never wish to see him more. Duke," she went on, resting her hand softly on my shoulder, "Lord Overbury is nothing—can be nothing to you. Avoid him."

"He will do me harm, you think?"

"Heaven forbid, my boy." She kissed me tenderly; there were tears in her eyes.

"He must not come between us, Duke. He must never part us; promise me he shall not." I was amazed at her sudden emotion.

"Indeed, I don't wish to see his face again."

She wrung my hand.

Rosetta's name was on my tongue. It was on her account, I knew, that I had turned against Lord Overbury. For otherwise, surely, I had received but kindness at his hands. Mistaken kindness, it might be; yet well intentioned; could I doubt it?

I longed to speak of Rosetta, with a boy's garrulousness and fond craving for sympathy. It would have so eased my heart to have told something of what was troubling it, and to have given words to the vague suspicions and pains, regrets and yearnings that were tossing and burning within me. They would have been more easily endured, it seemed to me, could I have given them shape and some definite substance by speaking of them. I could not. Rosetta! a rope-dancer! flying with Lord Overbury after but a few minutes' speech with him! How could I talk of such things to my mother? I had hidden little from her hitherto; but this revelation would seem insulting, monstrous, outrageous. She would certainly fail to understand me, would misjudge the matter terribly, suspect, rebuke me far more than I merited. She had not seen Rosetta. Perhaps, she could never be brought to see her with my eyes. She would misconceive her, think of her probably as Mauleverer, a far more

lenient judge, had thought and spoken—no, I could not do it. Rosetta must remain a secret; yet it was hard to hide from my mother a thing that seemed so vital to me.

She thought me only over-fatigued and nervously excited, probably, by experiences very new to me. I left her for a moment, in obedience to an established rule at the Down Farm, to visit the stables and make sure that my pony had been properly cared for. When I returned she had raked out the fire, and packed up her knitting.

I thought I had never before seen her looking so sad, enfeebled, and wan. But it was now past midnight, and she was perhaps tired out with waiting for my return.

I slept heavily for an hour or two, and then found myself starting up, restless on my bed, far too wakeful for further repose. I occupied myself, or was occupied in spite of myself, in going through, over and over again, each event of the day, down to the most minute particulars. All I had said and done, and my thoughts and feelings the while. All that had been said and done in my presence, and, conjecturally, the thoughts and feelings of those I had encountered. And Rosetta, of course, engaged me incessantly. Or if, for a time, I seemed able to banish her from my mind, she was soon back there again, to the subjection of all other meditations. Her beauty, her graceful gestures, her glances, her words, all were present to me most vividly. And then came the terrible thought of her flight, of her unworthiness.

Again and again I persuaded myself that this could not be; that cruel injustice had been done her; that some unfortunate accident, capable of very simple explanation, had brought the most unfair suspicions upon her. Yet I had ever to begin anew this task of self-persuasion. Could I resist the judgment of her fellows of the booth? What had they thought? Mauleverer was no severe censor; he had been inclined to make excuses; he had expressed himself with reserve; yet could I question the conclusion at which he had arrived? Would he have joined Diavolo in the pursuit but that he felt some confidence as to the likely fate of Rosetta? He had known her longer and better, of course, than I did, who had seen her but for a few minutes. And though he had talked of finding her at Dripford on his return, he was clearly not hopeful on that score; he really believed—there could be no doubt of it—that she had fled with Lord Overbury.

I was up early and about the farm, for I was too ill at ease to lie in my bed; action of some kind seemed indispensable to me. I found my uncle limping with rheumatic pains in the farm-yard. The horses were being harnessed for the fields.

"Well, Duke, so you sold the lambs well, I hear," he said to me, cheerily. "Glad to see you abroad so early."

"I'm going on to Reube."

"You'll find him in the ten acre bottom, just beyond the swedes."

I hastened onward, anxious to avoid questioning about the fair.

Reube was hard at work, pitching hurdles for the stock sheep. He had resumed his every-day clothes. For him the chief event of the year was over. Thoughts of it and of the successful part he had played in it, cheered him still; but it was not his way to waste time in brooding over the past. He prided himself on what he called his "vore-cast." Probably, in his mind's eye, if he possessed such an organ, he had already in view the lambs of next season, the flocks of the future.

I inquired of him if he had been overtaken by—if he had seen anything of—a post-chaise driven rapidly along the road from Dripford, on his way home?

"Not that I moind, Measter Duke. But there was a nation zight of carts and carriages on the road. Just about a lot of people. I dunno as I ever saw more volks got together than there was at fair, yesterday."

"You saw nothing of Lord Overbury?"

"Eez, I saw un at fair anighst the market-place, just avore I started whome. 'Well, shepherd,' a' zays, 'hast zold lambs?'

'Eez, I zays. 'What price?' a' axes.

'Trimming!' I zays."

"He was alone?"

"No, a'd a young ooman alongside un."

"What like was she, Reube?"

"I just didn't take pertickler notice, Measter Duke. 'Twarn't for the likes of I to be pryin' aboot his lordship. A' zeemed a main sprack kind o' wench, though. Not from these parts, as I knows on. I caan't mind as I ever zet eyes on her avore, or should know her again if I was to zee her. There's always a caddling lot of women gets aboot fair, zee, sir. Where um comes from, or where um goes to, there I caan't tell'ee. But um bain't there for much good, most-like, I be thinking."

"Was she tall or short?"

"There, I caan't zay as to heeth (height) nor colour. A' was young, I moind, and

his lordship was laughin' and talkin' just as a' always is. Main maggotty a' zeemed, and dree parts vuddled; only 'tain't for I to be zaying zo."

I could gather nothing farther from Reube, and so departed, idly to watch the ploughing in an adjoining field, my thoughts little concerned, however, in that operation. I saw the brown earth striped with lines of a deeper brown as the bright colter clove and upturned the soil. I listened to the ploughmen's cries of direction to their teams of horses and oxen. "Ga oot!" "Coom hedder!" "There, right!" as the obedient cattle paced to and fro, furrowing the land with curious precision. But the while I was, in truth, thinking, dreaming of Rosetta.

In the afternoon, pleading some vague excuse, I know not what, I hurried out and rode hard as I could to Dripford.

Compared with yesterday, the town seemed dead; its inhabitants absent, or locked in slumber. Scarce a trace of the fair was discernible. The market-place was empty; there might almost have been grass growing in the streets. Sheep, shepherds, dogs, pens, hurdles, all were gone. The booths, tents, shows, swings, and theatre, were no more to be seen.

There was not a soul in the coffee-room of the King's Head. Even the barmaids were absent from their post. A waiter could not be found.

It was with difficulty I roused a sleepy ostler in the stable. But I could elicit no information from him. He knew nothing of Lord Overbury; save that he had been in the town yesterday, and was not there to-day. No post-chaise, he asserted, had left the King's Head.

I could learn nothing, in fact.

"And the shows and theatres, when will they be here again?"

"This time next year, most like."

"And where are they gone? Where are they to be found meanwhile?"

"Lord knows!" he answered.

It was no affair of his. He turned away, and fell asleep again upon a truss of straw.

CHAPTER XIX. LOST.

DID I love Rosetta? I fancied so; but I could not be sure. I was, as she had said, "a mere boy." What did I know of love? What, indeed, did I know of anything? I had studied some few books; but of life and the world I had scarcely read a page. I had been reared in absolute retirement. The little village of

Purrington had been to me a universe. Steepleborough, and now Dripford, had been the furthest points of my wanderings from home. The expedition to the great sheep fair was the most memorable event in my career. And it had nearly turned my brain.

Before this how few of my fellow-men I had ever even seen! I could almost count upon my fingers the names of those with whom I had interchanged speech. And how few women! My mother, Kem, a dairy-maid or two, the wives and daughters of the farm servants who worked in the fields—there were not many to be added to this list. To be sure there were to be seen in Purrington Church on Sundays some beribboned bonnets and glaring shawls clothing the farmers' spouses of the neighbourhood, and the apple-cheeked, sloe-eyed, broad-nosed Miss Rawsons, who sometimes came over from the Lower Wick Farm at Balborough to our afternoon service, and were thought by their friends, and by themselves, to be very fine-grown, comely, and attractive young women. With these I had certainly conversed now and then, but not often, and always without interest, and upon indifferent topics—chiefly, perhaps, as to the state of the weather, the thriving of Mr. Rawson's crops, or the condition of his sheep. I could find little else to say to them. I thought them good-natured and lively; but boisterous and a trifle vulgar. My mother, I remember, was always critical as to their style of dress, which she judged unbecoming and extravagant for their position in life. For the Lower Wick was but a small farm; Mr. Rawson was said to have been originally a "pig jobber," and was undoubtedly a rough and uncultivated person.

No. The Miss Rawsons, for all the glare of their finery and the flashing of their round open eyes, were nothing to me. But Rosetta! She was as a new revelation. The thought of her—the utterance of her name, audible but to myself—sent a strange thrill through me—set my heart beating, my cheeks blushing, my blood coursing and dancing through my veins with most exciting rapidity.

But if I indeed loved her it was with a boy's love: a nebulous poetic fondness that could assume no distinctness of shape or find certainty of expression; that was yet content with its own vagueness; that did not aspire to possession, but was so largely leavened with reverence that it craved only for liberty to adore humbly, abjectly, at

the feet of its idol. It was, at this time, my crowning wish to see her again—only to see her, for however brief a span, and feed anew my excess of admiration. It was all foolish and absurd enough, very likely. But, at least, my boyish passion was instinct with a boy's purity and spirit of self-sacrifice.

It was strange that with all my extravagance on this head—and it is, I think, a sort of tribute, so far, to its genuineness and integrity—that I never once concealed from myself, or strove to conceal, the wretched circumstances attending my first meeting with Rosetta, and marking her life, condition, and aspect. As it seems to me, I recognised fully all these disenchantments, and yet remained in spite of them wholly enchanted. I was at once sane and insane. She was to me an angel; and yet a rope-dancer too. She was exquisitely beautiful; yet her cheeks were roughly stained with paint, her dress miserable in its tawdriness. When I thought of her, as I did incessantly, and conjured up from memory a vision of her as I had first seen her—and this I seemed for ever doing—she appeared to me at once lovely and squalid. While I dwelt upon her wondrous charms of glance and expression, and form and colour, I could yet note, not less certainly, her soiled dancer's dress; her tarnished spangles, shabby ribbons, and frayed sandals. I could admit that her speech to me had been abrupt even to rudeness; that her manner had lacked refinement; that her life had been without doubt rough and wretched enough; that her calling had entailed upon her a thousand degradations that could not but blemish her nature, and destroy her self-respect. She was probably uncultivated, illiterate; skilled in nothing but the poor art she professed; was content to win applause from the most despicable of crowds. Yet seeing, knowing all this, I loved her. Her grace and beauty overcame and possessed me absolutely. I viewed her with a supreme tenderness and pity that subdued and absorbed all attendant considerations, however forcibly they might be presented to me by myself or by others.

But, indeed, there was no one to speak to me about her, there was no one to whom I could speak. My love was my secret, unguessed, assuredly, by its object, known to myself alone. It was at this period I produced my first verses; love and Rosetta being of course their theme and burden. My first verses! I content myself with

recording the fact. I have looked at them since, years and years after they were written. I read them with amazement. Yet, at the time, how veritable and sterling seemed their fervour!

I was unhappy, yet, somehow, pleased at being unhappy, proud of my passion, not dissatisfied at hearing that I looked pale and worn. There was even a sort of comfort in studying my image in the glass, and assuring myself of this fact—young idiot that I was!

I had seen nothing more of Rosetta; I could learn no tidings of her. I went long distances, almost to the foundering of my pony, to various fairs and rural festivals in the county, and searched and inquired for her in booths and shows of all kinds. But without avail. Indeed, while doing this I felt that it was futile. She was lost to me. I should never see her more.

Again and again I visited the lodge of Overbury Hall, and cross-questioned old Thacker as to the proceedings of his lordship. I learnt nothing. Old Thacker could tell me nothing; he had indeed nothing to tell. It seemed quite certain that Lord Overbury had not been near the hall for a long time past.

Once a ray of hope did, for a moment, illumine my despair. The time for Lockport races had come round again. On the platform of a booth just outside the course, I felt assured that I recognised Mauleverer. He was parading round and round in front of a travelling theatre with other performers variously dressed. But he no longer played the part of a clown. He wore flowing robes, a majestic beard; a tinselled crown circled his brows. He was a king.

I hurriedly mounted to the platform and spoke to him; he knew me at once. He looked old and dejected I thought; the lines in his face had deepened much, his cheeks were pendulous, and his voice had lost its old round-toned quality; he now spoke with difficulty, and in a harsh husky whisper. He expressed great joy at meeting me, while deploring the evil fortune that still attended his professional exertions.

"I'm not the man I was," he said; "but still this isn't quite the thing, is it? for me—for me of all people! I hope still for better days; but I don't know—I grow old. I can't afford to wait much longer. The tide's been too long turning. And I've caught cold sitting on the bank watching for change. It's my luck. My cough? Chronic asthma they call it. At times I can

shout with the best of them—louder, and to more effect. For I was an elocutionist, if there ever was one, of the best school. Then comes my cough again, and I'm—as you find me. So I'm cast for heavy business now; and I try to make hoarseness pass for suppressed emotion. It's all I can do. Cold, from exposure, and perhaps want. Ah, Master Duke, how often I've thought of the virtuals of the Down Farm. All well there? That's right. Real virtuals they were. Yes. I'm still among the boothers. But not clown now. Hush. Not a word of that. It's not generally known. Loss of dignity in our profession is loss of money. And loss of money is hunger, and thirst, and—asthma. You were saying——"

I had tried to interject a question as to Rosetta. But I broke down.

"Diavolo," I said. "Where is he?"

"Dead," replied Mauleverer. "What? You've not heard of it? It made some noise too. He was trying the high jeff—the high rope, you know—and he wasn't sober. To do him justice he seldom was. And he fell heavily. They picked him up—dead. Internal injuries, the doctors said. Exit Diavolo. He was not a nice man. Yet he had been first-rate in his own line; an inferior business when all's said; but he knew it all thoroughly, and could do it all, taken at his best, beyond any one I ever saw in that way of life. You remember meeting us that night as we drove back to Dripford?"

I could now fairly inquire about Rosetta. Mauleverer shook his head.

"From that day to this, I've never seen her, nor heard a word of or from her. I thought she might have written a line to Mrs. Jecker, who'd been kind to her; but she didn't—women are not grateful generally. Afraid of Diavolo? Perhaps so. A clever little girl; but there, she's gone."

"And you can't think what's become of her?"

"Perhaps. But where's the use? I don't know."

"But you think she went away with——"

"Don't you?" he asked quickly. "But it isn't our business, is it?"

"If I could only find her, Mauleverer: if I could only see her again!"

He was silent, looking at me with a curious blending of wonder and pity.

"You're still a young farmer," he said, after awhile. Then he added, noting I suppose my depressed air: "Come, don't

you be chapfallen. Leave that to me and others. You've life and the world before you. Fortune hasn't yet been hard upon you. Think how she's served me! And I was your age, once. Make better use of your time than I have done. And never fret. I don't. Though Heaven knows I've cause."

He wrung my hand. He was summoned to enter the booth and take part in the performance.

"For the tight-rope girl, you'll laugh about her, some day. Don't be angry, I don't mean immediately."

Laugh about Rosetta! I was angry. He apologised profusely, and I could not but be appeased. Then he drew me aside, and, in a hurried whisper, implored a loan. I emptied my purse into his hand.

"Shall I pass you into the boxes?" he asked. Poor Mauleverer!

I quitted the race-course hurriedly, without even waiting to see the Lockport Cup run for, although the race for the Lockport Cup was the chief "turf" event of our country side. And the favourite, indeed, had been trained within a few miles of Purrington, and much anxiety prevailed thereabout as to his success.

No wonder that when I met Farmer Jobling on my way home—he had been to a sale of farming stock at Denton—and could not answer his question as to the winner of the race, he thought "that boy of Mrs. Nightingale's" stark mad, or a born fool, he could not quite decide which. So I afterwards learnt he had expressed himself in my regard to certain of his neighbours, who kindly made speed to publish his opinion.

That I was the occasion of much perplexity and distress to my mother and my uncle I could not doubt. They forebore to question me; waiting probably for explanation to come from me. We seemed all strangely silent, indeed, at the Down Farm. There was division amongst us of a new kind. If a certain lack of sympathy ever existed between us, and there were times perhaps when this was really the case, it now seemed curiously increased and intensified. They failed, as it was natural enough they should fail, to understand me; how then could they sympathise with me? There was no shortcoming in their kindness to me; this perhaps was rather augmented than otherwise. But they viewed me somewhat as a patient, suffering from some undefined malady, that was alike beyond their skill to heal or their power to comprehend. And they watched me; affec-

tionately, and yet with an anxiety that had its elements, as it seemed to me, of suspicion and distrust. They watched me, the while they seemed unconscious of so doing, or busily sought to conceal the intentness of their regard. Often I noted my uncle's cold inquiring eyes steadfastly fixed upon me, while his face wore a baffled and bewildered expression. Then, finding that he was in his turn observed, he would with a start endeavour to concern himself with some indifferent subject, speaking at random or permitting his snuff-box to engross his attention. My mother, too, scrutinised me not less persistently, saying little the while. Once, however, having convinced herself that I was really ill, she adjured me urgently to seek the aid of Doctor Turton of Steepleborough. It was with difficulty I could avoid submitting myself for cure of my troubled heart to the hands of that practitioner, our nearest medical man.

My failure as a farmer, too, became very apparent. I was conscious that in my character as "the young squire," I exhibited myself to signal disadvantage. I went to and fro, hither and thither, about the fields and among the labouring people, but I did little more than make manifest my deficiencies. I felt that I knew nothing, that I learned nothing. My uncle had reason enough to be dissatisfied with me—to charge me with taking no interest in my occupation, with neglecting the opportunities afforded me for improving myself. Yet, if he reproached me, it was more by his looks than his words.

"You remember what we had last year in that fifteen-acre field yonder, beside the firs?" he asked me one day, testing me.

"Vetches," I answered at random.

"No, no, Duke, you forget," he said, with a disappointed air. "Barley; some of the best barley I ever sent to market. There was none finer in the whole county. It's in clover, now; and a very fine crop. What do you think I ought to do with it for next year?"

"Swedes," I suggested.

"No, no; wheat, and then swedes, perhaps, and then barley again; that's considered a very good honest course. Fair to the land, to the landlord, and to the farmer. It's what they call the Norfolk course, and Norfolk farming's thought highly of. You should try and recollect these things."

I did try, yet somehow I failed.

It was a very hard winter that year, I remember. The spring seemed never coming. There had been a long continu-

ance of severe frost and biting winds, with heavy falls of snow. It was an anxious time for all our farmers and flock-masters; the poor sheep suffered severely. The ponds were all frozen; the roads were impassable almost. Reube was at his folds day and night. His devotion to his duty, to his master's interests, knew no bounds; he fought against the elements with exceeding gallantry. The fainting ewes had oftentimes to be dug bodily out of deep snow-drifts; the new-born lambs entered upon life under most trying conditions, found themselves occupants of a very hard and bleak world indeed. Death decimated the flock. Poor Reube was in despair. Oftentimes I found him stripping off his coat to wrap it round his infant lambs; shivering in his shirt-sleeves himself, yet content if they could but be kept warm and alive. It was ludicrous, perhaps, yet it was, in its way, genuine heroism. No mother could have lavished more care and tenderness upon her baby children. He was content and comforted in that his pains and zeal were not wholly unavailing; and he took pride in some specific of his own devising, composed, I think, of warm milk and gin, with which he freely dosed his own ailing young charges in their earliest stages of animation. We lost fewer lambs than any of our neighbours, although that was not saying very much.

My uncle was gratified that I did all in my power to assist the shepherd, that I was with him early and late, relieving him of some labour, and oftentimes taking his place as night-watcher by the fold. The fact was that I had need of occupation and excitement of any sort; that I slept but ill; that it was a relief and satisfaction to be about doing something—anything.

It was late in the afternoon. A frosty sunset lent a rosy flush to the snow-laden landscape. There stretched out before me a vast sea of dazzling white waves and tender purple-grey shadows. I was warmly wrapped in a shepherd's coat, wandering I scarcely knew whither, idly noting the strange wintry beauty of the scene; the snow crunching noisily under my heavy boots, my devious track marked upon the down by deep indentations. I was advancing towards the fir plantation, lured by the sight of the whitened trees, each branch and leaf sustaining its feathery load of snow, as though it had been a trophy or a prize; or bent on watching the rays of the sinking sun glancing among the boughs in ruddy arrows of misty light.

Suddenly—could it be?—I perceived a figure in the plantation. A woman seated upon a pile of fallen fir trunks, crouching, covering her face with her hands. I was within a few paces of her before she stirred. Then she looked up. I almost screamed in my amazement.

It was Rosetta!

BLACKMAIL.

BLACKMAIL, like other evils, has a wonderful tenacity of life. It is indeed no novelty, although its changes of shape are worthy of Proteus. Illicit payments and illegal demands, or quasi-demands, have no doubt existed in all ages of the world. Extortion is coeval with human society. In its rudest and earliest form it was levied by wholesale, and with a simple directness of action that might be understood by a child. A petty principality paid tribute to some mighty kingdom hard by. A peaceful people bought off the hostility of some clan of warlike barbarians. The Danegeld—the sword of gold by the aid of which England so often purchased a precarious truce from the pagans of the north—was identical in principle with the ignominious ransoms wrung from Rome, first by the Gaul and then by the Goth. The bribes by which Rob Roy and his caterans were induced to spare the cattle of their Lowland neighbours, were akin to those regarding which the tourist who ventures beyond Jordan has to haggle with the greedy sheikh who is to protect him from the rapacity of other tribes.

The exaction of arbitrary tolls is one of the oldest and most general impediments to travel. A mediæval merchant, for example, resembled a sheep forcing its way through briers, and leaving on every thorn a scrap of torn fleece. All along the Rhine each mountain peak had its strong castle, whence a robber-baron surveyed the broad river, and the rocky road, ready to pounce on boat or train of pack-mules with the swoop of a hawk that spies some incautious covey of partridges. The trader whose route lay among Flemish meadows and corn-fields fared little better, for were there not lying in his path frequent frontiers, where his Grace of Guelders, and my Lord of Cleves, and the Prince Bishop of Liege, and his Highness of Brabant, and his Mightiness of Burgundy, and the Free Cities of the Holy Roman Empire, required, per proxy of harpy-eyed inten-

dants, and swaggering men-at-arms, a slice of every commercial cake that was carried across the boundary? In the East, Mecca, and Samarcand, and Bagdad were to be reached only by those who had coaxed and feed Bedouin, Turcoman, and Kurd into tolerant good humour, while in Africa a caravan has ever been considered, in the expressive jargon of the Soudan, as "Dum-malafong," a thing for prey and plunder, mulcted to-day by a negro king, and subject on the morrow to a tax enforced at the point of the spear by Moslem marauders.

In comparatively civilised countries, and especially under a system of centralised despotism, blackmail naturally changes its character. Small tyrannies and tyrants are swallowed up by the Imperial Gargantua, and satraps, proconsuls, and mandarins are presumed to be merely the passive instruments of the one sovereign will that sways the destinies of the nation. Of course this method, from inherent faults, has never worked smoothly in practice. The jack-in-office, by whatsoever sonorous name he may be called, whose business it is to plunder for his master, is perfectly certain to rob still more unscrupulously on his own account, and to his greed must be added the hunger of all his deputies and led captains, his satellites, henchmen, and hangers-on. It is a Persian proverb, that when the shah asks for an egg, his servants demand a cow, and, indeed, the snowball of exaction grows with the multiplication of those who are the willing tools of power. The Turkish soldier, after living at free quarters, modestly requests to be paid in hard cash for the wear and tear of his teeth, and, in many European and Asiatic countries, the privates in that great host of civil placemen which the government retains in its service must choose between a lingering death by famine, and the raising of unlawful contributions from those with whom they have to deal.

Justice, a tempting commodity, has not seldom been dealt in as unblushingly as if it had been cloth or butter to be vended by the yard or by the pound. This peculiar variety of the noxious weed, blackmail, readily extirpated in a strong and healthy state, finds favourable conditions of growth where the moral standard is low, and the public conscience dull. We in England have not had to reckon judicial corruption among our national shortcomings. The lasting indignation which Bacon's venality evoked, would to Neapolitans or Mexicans

appear absurdly misplaced. The so-called compliments, the gifts of money or produce, with which, in days long past, a few English suitors have approached a few English judges, were not deemed so degrading to donor or recipient as we should now most properly consider them. They were not intended as the price of a judicial decision, but rather as a means of securing an early hearing. It was prompt justice, perhaps a little leavened by indulgence, which the giver strove to procure; a little underhanded oiling of the legal machinery; and bargaining for the gain of a lawsuit was unknown. And in even the most debased community there exists a wholesome instinct of repugnance to the habitual maladministration of justice which cannot fail to keep the mischief within bounds. We read of cadis who weighed Hassan's proffered purse against that of Selim, and of Russian magistrates, who met plaintiff and defendant with the pertinent question, "What will you give?" But such barefaced traffickers in verdicts were, we may be sure, outnumbered by the humdrum functionaries who dispensed decrees that were tolerably equitable, while the legal cormorant was never safe from being forced to disgorge his prey, and his life along with it, by the unceremonious interference of some shah, sultan, or governor, more lynx-eyed than was common.

Grace, however, the king's bounty, the goodwill of my lord high treasurer, the smile of his grandeur the bishop, or of some other potent personage, lay or ecclesiastical, had its market value long after hireling judges had become nearly or quite extinct. London was always full of young men, who, like Shakespeare's Roderigo, had put money in their purses, and sowed the golden seed in hopes of a glittering harvest. Tall, rawboned Ralph sought his majesty's commission to raise a company for service in Flanders or Ulster. Will, who was thought to have a pretty wit, went about with copies of verses in the pocket of his best doublet, and burned to recite his rhythmic fancies before a fashionable audience. Handsome Harry, who had been equipped for his metropolitan venture by the combined efforts of his admiring family, and whose laced shirts and coat of green satin slashed and pinked with silver had sorely diminished his sister's slender dowry, already saw himself a courtier living on some comfortable sinecure. Even sober Tom, with supple backbone and faultless Latinity, had come to London with

the shrewd notion that he might readily wriggle himself into a fat benefice, and that the shortest road to preferment lay through some great man's antechamber. All these aspirants, in one shape or another, paid blackmail. Now, it was a broad piece slipped into the willing palm of the patron's confidential servant, now a tavern bill or a tailor's account defrayed to pleasure some Grub-street bard, at whose buffooneries the young bloods of the court condescended to laugh when in their cups. Anon it was a purse tremulously pressed upon my lord himself, along with the abject entreaty of his lordship's worshipful good word with king or minister. Cerberus had many heads, and a sop was seldom unwelcome to each and all of them.

France was, perhaps, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the happy hunting-ground of those who lived by blackmail. For every place-seeker who haunted the Mall or the Park there were a score whose red-heeled shoes were familiar with the pavement of Versailles. On the other side of the Channel there was, indeed, much more to give away than ever lay at the disposal of English sovereigns and statesmen. It is wonderful to reflect on the patience with which a burden of taxation, gradually growing more and more intolerable, was endured by the bulk of the nation. Almost equally amazing, to the student of historical records, is the pertinacious and clamorous fashion in which the privileged classes forced their demands upon royalty. Exempt from taxes, masters of two-thirds of the soil of France, and with a traditional right to all that was choicest in the wide patronage of the crown, the nobility and clergy still craved for hard money, for pensions, gifts, and gratifications, with a hungry eagerness which it was impossible to appease.

The Bourbon monarchs of France, apparently all-powerful, were in reality little more than glorified sharers of the spoil among the nobles of their prodigal court. The great officers of state had a freehold right to their posts about the person of the king. All over the realm stretched a network of titular employments, often obsolete, often absurdly useless, but all as completely private property as the chateau of the marquis, or the manor-house of the chevalier. Each regiment belonged to the colonel whose name it bore, and who knew to a pistole its value in the market. Presidents and counsellors of parliament held their places in the tribunal

as they held the silver plate in their oaken presses, as something for which they had paid, and which they were at liberty to sell. And besides the needy young abbés begging for the rents of some monastery that they would never see, while they wasted its revenues in Parisian amusements, besides the applicants for military, judicial, or diplomatic promotion, there were hundreds of voices always swelling the chorus of "Give, give!" Crowds of suitors hovered around the royal purlieus, resolved that, if the king did not portion their daughters, pension their sons, or indemnify themselves for some supposititious injury or service, it should not be for want of importunity. Suppliants so shameless as these were not likely to recoil from bribery, if thus the royal favour could be won. Accordingly pots-de-*vin*, homages, and other variously-styled payments were constantly offered to those who were supposed to have easy access to the most Christian king. Under Louis the Fifteenth in especial, there was almost an open auction for the sale of what the monarch had to bestow.

Vails, perquisites, and fees to servants may fairly be included under the general head of blackmail. In the last century this abuse had swollen, in England at least, to almost unbearable dimensions. Gentlemen of modest income hesitated before accepting my lord the earl's hospitality. The dinner might be excellent, and the company of the finest, but the guest had too often a drop of bitter in his cup, that spoiled the flavour of the claret, as he remembered the awful ordeal of departing betwixt a double file of rapacious menials, every one of whom considered himself as basely defrauded if the present which he received were not up to the standard of his expectations. A little lower in the social scale were the houses where "card and candle money" was exacted from those who were rash enough to sit down to the whist-table, or to partake of supper. The besom of Time has swept away this last abuse, but it is still an expensive luxury to visit at one of those country mansions that are the boast of rural England, and especially if the sojourner be inclined, for once, to imitate the feats of the provincial Nimrods around him. Sir John, whose pride is in his well-stocked covers, and who vaunts that every pheasant costs him a guinea before it drops to the gun, must surely be aware that his guests pay fantastic prices to his chief gamekeeper for the ammunition which they employ in knocking over

those barley-fed birds, and that, while a "hot corner" is deferentially allotted to the free-handed donor of a rustling bank-note, scowls and neglect are the portion of the "shabby" fellow who last October remunerated the services of Mr. Ramrod by the gift of a pitiful sovereign. Lord Harkaway, who mounts half a score of horseless visitors for a lawn meet of his unrivalled pack, can hardly be in ignorance that the stud-groom and his subordinates reckon as confidently on being paid—and well paid—for each sleek-necked steed, as if Harkaway Castle stables were those of a London job-master.

Our fathers and grandsires of the coaching days were accustomed to groan over the extortions which then attended a long journey by stage or mail. The rubicund coachman had to be remembered, the red-coated guard not forgotten, while the traveller who quitted a wayside inn found on the first landing Betty Chambermaid, with outstretched hand familiar with half-crowns, a few steps lower down the nap-kined waiter, hard-eyed and glib of speech, and in the hall the Boots expectant, ready, if not contented, to point out the parsimonious pilgrim as a butt for the derisive jeers of a sympathetic knot of postilions and carriage-washers. And although throughout civilised Europe attendance is now a fixed charge in the hotel bill, few, very few, travellers have the moral hardihood to disregard the speaking looks which warn them that custom exacts that they should pay twice over for service rendered. When first the snorting dragon of steam bore down the feeble opposition of the old coaches, one of the merits of railways was announced to be the abolition of a number of vexatious imposts once deemed inseparable from the act of journeying in a public conveyance. In some respects this confident prediction has been realised. The swart stoker pouches no shillings, the careworn engine-driver has by no means succeeded to the dignity and emoluments of Mr. Coachman. The guard is as polite to ladies who give him nothing as to young men who do. But the fustian-clad porter unites a discriminating eye for the probable donor of loose silver, a serene scorn for the obsolete proclamation which forbids the servants of the company to accept money, and prompt attention is considered as a fair equivalent for current coin.

That a cabman should regard himself as an injured being when tendered his legal fare, a circumstance which often

sorely puzzles the intelligent foreigner on his first visit to London, is perhaps not so very remarkable. The enormous extent of the capital prevents the adoption, as in Paris and elsewhere, of a uniform rate of payment, so that a small financial and geographical problem demands solution each time that a journey is made in a hackney-carriage. That the tariff seems low in itself, and that miles have a tendency, in the cabman's imagination, to succeed one another with a rapidity strange to the impartial scrutiny of calm science, is also natural enough, considering how very easily we credit that which it is convenient to us to believe. But in truth the whole state of public opinion on the vexed subject of cab fares is a relic of the epoch of extortion, ruffianism, and false shame, which went before. The jarveys and chairmen of London, the Thames watermen, the porters who shouldered portmanteaus belonging to voyagers in Hessian boots and roquelaures, had established a kind of vested interest in wrong doing. That when a steam-packet bound for Rotterdam or Antwerp lay in mid-river, First Oars and his fellow Triton should obstinately keep the wherry bobbing about at the distance of a cable's length from the ship's side, until the entrapped hirers had agreed to pay a couple of guineas "smart money," instead of some two shillings honestly due for their conveyance, was thought merely a piece of sharp practice. The only way of turning the tables on some abusive giant of the shoulder-knot was to defeat him in single combat, and even in the days when Jackson taught boxing, those who were competent to engage in such a task could have been but a minority. Neither to thrash an extortioner, nor to comply with his demands, was held to imply a mixture of stinginess and effeminacy worthy of the heartfelt contempt of a British mob, and as such was often visited by promiscuous pelting with mud and cabbage-stalks. The cabman is, after all, a mild and revised edition of the ancient ministers to the needs of locomotive Londoners.

Crossing the Line, originally a rough but not necessarily ill-natured outbreak of animal spirits and horseplay, was by degrees changed into an ingenious method of wringing blackmail from the passengers of an Indiaman. It was certainly more agreeable to extend enforced liberality to Neptune and his band of sturdy mummers, than to commemorate the passage of the equator by being soaped and scraped,

ducked and drenched, in blinding brine and villanous lather, but it was better still when the rum-drinking, tobacco-chewing sea-king and his mimic court were improved for ever from off the face of the waters by the combined efforts of Waghorn and of steam. The Camorra of Naples, which lasted till that yesterday which witnessed the reunion of dismembered Italy, was a remarkable instance of illegal taxation submitted to without a murmur. When the great gang had been finally broken up by the Italian police, the Neapolitans of the lower class felt, for a time, that uneasy alarm which sheep feel when abandoned by dog and drover on a strange high-road. The market-woman crossed herself as she took up her accustomed station without seeing the business-like agent of the Camorra gliding towards her to take toll of her butter and ripe figs. The winning gambler muttered his orison to Hercules and Saint Januarius when no authoritative hand was outstretched for a share of the bright ducats. Bronzed fishermen, who had duly set aside the little heap of fresh-caught fish that was the perquisite of the Camorra, grew suspicious and unhappy when no notice was taken of the offering. It was not immediately that those whose contributions swelled the revenues of the mysterious association could convince themselves that the compact was dissolved, and the brotherhood of the dagger no longer powerful to protect or to punish.

Blackmail sometimes assumes the form of presents, periodical, or given only on some remarkable occasion. Wedding gifts belong to the latter category, Etrennes and Christmas boxes to the former. New Year's Day has its terrors for many a Parisian bachelor of moderate means. If he be an elderly young man—and there are not a few garçons à marier, whose varnished boots have trodden the polished hard wood of his friends' floors for more seasons than they would care to acknowledge—he sighs for the good old times of Orleanist simplicity, when a few flowers, a few bonbons, and some toys of trifling value, sufficed to set him right with his entertainers and their families. Alas! bouquets of rare exotics cost more and more money as the *Nouvel An* comes round; dolls become each year more gorgeous as to their wardrobes, and more life-like as regards their size; sweetmeats are no longer acceptable unless enclosed in showy boxes that triple the expense of the

gaudy sugar-plums inside, and the critical children of this generation think scorn of such humble playthings as inspired transports of delight when displayed before their aunts and uncles. The concierge, too, Monsieur Pipelet, is as a lion in the path, each first of January finding him harder to satisfy, gruffer, greedier, more implacably tyrannical than before. Poor Anatole! poor Jules! As they spread their scanty store upon the green cloth of the writing-table, and call to mind how many claimants there are for every five-franc piece, how cordially must they wish for any decent excuse for rushing into the country, there to remain until the new year should be well begun, and Etrennes regarded already as things of the past.

Our English tribulations at Christmas are more patiently submitted to than the extravagant New Year's tax which has grown to its present Parisian proportions during the lavish expenditure of the Second Empire; but paterfamilias, if worried and perturbed by the inky snowdrift of legitimate bills, must often question himself as to the right by which beadle and bellman, sweep and scavenger, the Waits that make night hideous with cracked clarionet and braying trombone, the journeymen butcher and baker, and, in short, all and sundry who profess to have contributed to his comfort, levy tribute at Yule tide. The postman's yearly fee is, perhaps, the one that is the least grudged, for few are so unfortunate as not to have a lively interest in their letters; and most householders appreciate the activity of the zealous Mercury whose knock, in all weathers, is so punctual and so welcome. This, like poor Robin's tap, tapping with an anxious little beak outside the frosted window-pane, in quest of crumbs, is probably the most innocent among the varieties of blackmail.

LAY ME LOW.

LAY me low, my work is done,
I am weary. Lay me low,
Where the wild flowers woo the sun,
Where the balmy breezes blow,
Where the butterfly takes wing,
Where the aspens drooping grow,
Where the young birds chirp and sing.
I am weary, let me go.

I have striven hard and long,
In the world's unequal fight,
Always to resist the wrong,
Always to maintain the right,
Always with a stubborn heart
Taking, giving blow for blow.
Brother, I have played my part,
And am weary, let me go.

Stern the world and bitter cold,
 Irksome, painful to endure,
 Everywhere a love of gold,
 Nowhere pity for the poor.
 Everywhere mistrust, disguise,
 Pride, hypocrisy, and show,
 Draw the curtain, close mine eyes,
 I am weary, let me go.

Others 'chance when I am gone
 May restore the battle-call,
 Bravely lead the good cause on,
 Fighting in the which I fall.
 God may quicken some true soul
 Here to take my place below
 In the heroes' muster-roll.
 I am weary, let me go.

Shield and buckler, hang them up,
 Drape the standard on the wall,
 I have drained the mortal cup
 To the finish, dregs and all.
 When our work is done 'tis best,
 Brother, best that we should go.
 I'm weary, let me rest,
 I'm weary, lay me low.

THE OBSERVATIONS OF MONSIEUR CHOSE.

VIII. AT DOMINOES.

"MADAME CHOSE is quite right," Tonnerre ventured to remark to me, while, with his long fingers, he shuffled the dominoes. "Look at Genest's way of arranging the government of the 4th of September. The first, Monsieur de Rochefort, is at the bagne. The second, Monsieur Jules Simon, is Minister of Public Instruction. The third, Monsieur Gambetta, is the hope of France. The fourth, Monsieur J. Favre, is called a forger by the third. The fifth, Monsieur Cremieux, is outraged by the second. The sixth and seventh are ambassadors. The eighth, Monsieur Trochu, is dragged through the mud by the first, the third, and the fifth. The ninth, Monsieur Glais-Bizoin, is spurned by all the rest. It's ignoble, Chose. Is there an honest man left in France? Your play."

"Upon my word, Tonnerre, your sympathy with womankind will end by warping your judgment." I made this answer angrily. "Not that I can agree with the people who cry treason everywhere; and never believe a man is unfortunate, but always that the fallen man is a traitor. I wish I had the spirits of Cham. He can always laugh. The country is on the verge of another revolution, because Monsieur Thiers is indisposed. Let him cut his finger, and the funds will run down. Cham prescribes a new constitution for France under which the President will be bound by law to show his tongue three times a day, to prevent financial crises on the Bourse. The laughter over national dis-

aster is the puzzling part of my country's politics to me. The Tuileries are a charred ruin. Are we ashamed of it? No. Two clever fellows pass. One suggests it would make a first-rate museum—of draughts! There is catarrh in every angle of it. I shiver at the jest."

"We must be more serious, Chose. It is your play. We must get rid of the funny gentlemen who will hang their little jests upon the funeral car of their dearest friend. It is our curse that we are so spiritual. I play."

Tonnerre is right. "I had a lively ride a few days ago with half a dozen deputies. They were in the highest spirits, although the fortunes of the country were at a low ebb; and indulged in some very witty speculations. One honourable farceur suggested a compromise of all existing difficulties. 'Give,' said he, 'the presidency of the Senate to the Count of Chambord; the chairmanship of the Council of State to the Duke of Aumale; and the presidential fauteuil of the Deputies to the Prince Imperial, and thus, with the Little Man president for life, all susceptibilities would be satisfied, and we should run upon wheels, each of us with a fair bit of the cake in his hands.'"

"The rascals!" growled Tonnerre. "I can't play. It's the bit of cake they're all running after, while the workpeople want bread."

"It's a game of devil-take-the-hind-most," was my observation, and I gave Tonnerre an instance that had come within my own knowledge. "Some fifty years ago two young men came to Paris from the south, one was named Beaume, the other Thiers. They dined together at a twenty-two sous restaurant. Beaume was an artist, Thiers an art-critic. They were chums, and in the beginning Beaume had the advantage, for he had great talent as an artist, whereas his friend was but a poor art-critic. Beaume used to say to Adolphe, 'You know as much about art as my slipper.' That was true; but Thiers had more than one string to his bow. And so he struck off in a new direction, leaving the artist, who had only one string, far behind him. Beaume is still an artist of merit, and has been a knight of the Legion of Honour for thirty years; but how many people have heard of his talent? But who has not heard of the little art-critic who knew no more about pictures fifty years ago than his chum's slipper? The art-critic is president of us, and his old com-

panion is not certain of a corner in the salon. We are all players of the same game, Tonnerre, with France for our stage. When you tell me a certain man is a patriot, I say he is a winner. When Monsieur Patin put up the other day for the Municipal Council, and issued that flowery manifesto, and when he was opposed by that incendiary chemist, Guimaube, with his red posters—what did we see?"

"Two *faiseurs d'embarras*—two saltimbanches," was Tonnerre's prompt reply.

"True; two runners in the race of devil-take-the-hindmost. Patin pretended that he had reluctantly put down his bags of brown sugar to serve his country in the hour of her peril; while Guimaube aired himself as a sacrifice to the triumph of democratic ideas."

"Bah," growled Tonnerre, "you are neglecting the game, Chose. The double six."

But I would not be diverted from my point by dominoes. "We want unselfishness in these times; we want heart; we want courage. This fencing with tongues; these fights and plots of the infinitely little; these ignoble compromises which bring the Patins and the Guimaubes to the front; these gods from the gutters; this drinking of sugar and water, and phrase-making over unhappy France; these dances of death to the air of Ca Iramean national annihilation."

"Chose," said Tonnerre, presently, when I had beaten him, and when he was paying our reckoning, "I should advise you, my friend, to be more circumspect in your observations on passing events. It is you bourgeois who are the cause of every one of the evils you deplore. You chatter like monkeys, when you should be acting like men. Do you know what is happening; nay, shall I ask, do you know what has happened?"

I waited to hear in silence. I shall never forget the solemnity and agitation with which the old man spoke.

"Cannot you see it, man?" The wrinkled hand, scarred with a sabre-cut dealt by a Muscovite sword, while it held the flag of France in the front of battle, was pointed to the street. "You see nothing; but I see the clear outline of the ragged figure. From its cruel eyes to its flat feet, it is covered with red rags—made of the standards it has soiled and torn. The teeth are clenched like those of a hungry tiger. Was ever a more brutal caricature of a human head? The hair is matted upon the low skull. Mark the knotted

sinews of the bull-throat. The lean, ignoble figure is all angles. The gnarled joints are of monstrous size. Blood drips from the nails of the fingers. The legs are muddy to the knees. The feet seek the line of route where the dirt is thickest and slimiest. The point of a knife and the barrel of a pistol peep through the red rags. Cowards that they are—the crowd make way for the monster while he walks. The respectable citizens scowl, and hold their noses, and turn their backs; but not one lays a hand upon the brute.* And pray, Monsieur Chose, great critic of modern politics, whither, think you, is that pestilent wretch bound?"

I confessed my inability even to hazard a conjecture.

"To the workshops. To the houses of the poor. To the cabins of the match-box makers of Belleville. To the skilled and intelligent cabinet-makers and bronze-workers of the east of Paris. The red rags will madden them as they stand by their lathes and benches. And then, Monsieur Chose, the bourgeois will learn another lesson, by which—cared as he is, I admit it, in self-conceit and laziness—he will profit as little as he did when that figure passed along the Boulevards a year or two ago. Hark! The Carmagnole!"

But I heard nothing, except the click of the billiard-balls at the back of the café in which we were sitting.

"You can't hear it! Will you hear it when the Red Spectre plays it under your windows, summoning you to go forth and turn your pockets inside out? Do you think your deafness will cease when the Spectre's gory hand is in your watch-fob? Will your phrases be at an end?"

Captain Tonnerre glared round at the guests in the café; and the growling in his throat must have been audible almost at the billiard-table. An acquaintance drew me aside to ask me what could be the matter with the old gentleman.

"A little political discussion," said I. Whereat my questioner went away laughing.

"There is another fool," said Tonnerre, when I rejoined him. "He will wait till the red hand plucks his nightcap from his head. Oh! he will talk enough between this and then, and be very valiant over his absinthe; but devil a step will he take, even to vote against the Spectre. I sup-

* Gilray has drawn a figure of Revolution, in many points closely resembling the captain's.

pose he was laughing at my picture; but the last laugh will be mine, and I shall not have long to wait for it. So—— let us have another game.

CHAPTER IX. THE FEATHERS OF THE EAGLE.

"BLUNDER upon blunder!" said I to Madame Chose.

"You men do nothing else," was the conjugal reply. "The Captain Tonnerre has been here in a fury. He is generally a little more reasonable than you are"—(I bowed low as my acknowledgment of the compliment)—"but to-day he is a mad-man."

"But what is the matter, madame?"

"Don't ask me, Monsieur Chose. A man who is so lost as to refuse his wife point blank so pardonable a request as a friture at St. Cloud; when he has—to indulge his own ridiculous vanity—given up fishing one for her, with no better excuse than an itching to put his clumsy fingers into the state cauldron; that man—it is an act of indulgence to call him one—has lost all right not only to question his wife, but——"

Human patience had been tried too long. I brought my fist heavily down upon the table, where my wife was arranging a prodigious bouquet of violets, and fairly shouted:

"But! But what, madame? Have a care."

"Monsieur Chose having become a thorough brute—possibly to qualify himself for an active part in politics—I leave him." And, gathering up her flowers, she swept from the room.

But where was Tonnerre? He had, then, heard the news! Perhaps he was in the list of the Outraged. The bare idea made me tremble, for I knew that in the event of my surmise being correct, I should find him in one of those tumults of passion which make me fear that he will burst some day, like one of the muskets the patriotic agents of the 4th of September bought for our valiant army. I paced up and down the salon, asking myself whether it was possible to conceive a more ridiculous, and, at the same time, a more exasperating affront to a powerful section of an impatient and unsettled community? With "liberty, equality, and fraternity" painted upon the very building! A few old men—venerable and glorious as the flags that fluttered in the aisle; the fast-fading remnants of an epoch that was at any rate a grand one; the sabreurs of

Austerlitz; the half-score of witnesses to the glory of France, who were still on the right side of the cemetery gates; to slam the gates——

But here Madame Chose thrust her head into the salon, and, with the exquisite politeness that cuts like a surgeon's knife—only with no such honourable object—had the temerity to call my attention to the fact that our neighbours underneath us (with whom we were already not on good terms, because the water from our flower-pots had lately given an untimely douche to one of their friends) would probably tell the concierge, who would tell all the house, that Monsieur Chose had gone mad. "I should have thought," my discreet wife added, "that you had quite enough of speech-making at your club. But, perhaps, they have shut it up?"

"Shut up the White Mice! The club of respectability, where no man is admitted who doesn't wear spectacles, and no man can preside whom Nature has not gifted with a brutus! Madame, your pleasantry is in the worst taste, especially at this moment; and, permit me the liberty of adding, very silly."

"In a course of political study, I long ago discovered, Monsieur Chose, that gallantry to women was not included. I am sure I wonder how Captain Tonnerre has managed to remember something of the bienséances, while he has been under your august protection as a sucking saviour of his country. But he has managed to retain a little good sense for his own personal use, at the risk of injuring his country by the loss of it. He is no longer a White Mouse!"

With this shot, which struck home, madame closed the door of her chamber. Tonnerre no longer a White Mouse! The thing was impossible! He was among the earliest members. He was of the committee of organisation. He was one of the founders. No, no, this was merely a poisoned shaft from Madame Chose's capacious quiver. Now, if ever, the White Mice should stand together—as one mouse. The times were critical indeed when men went about with liberty upon their lips and gaoler's keys in their pockets; when young conscripts could be found to slap the faces of the tottering heroes of our mightiest story; when——

At this moment Madame Chose returned to the salon, her daintily-arrayed head covered with her best capuchon, and fan and lorgnette and bonbonnière in hand.

"I am going to the Opera, and then en soirée, Monsieur Chose," she said, in a silvery voice; "perhaps it is daring too much to request you to see me to a carriage."

"Madame, I am always at your service. But first tell me about Captain Tonnerre. You say he went off in a fury. I can very well understand it."

"Then, to a politician of your acuteness, there can be nothing to explain; and I am already very late."

My wife moved with determined steps towards the door, and I followed her; hoping by my politeness to elicit from her the cause of Tonnerre's exasperation—though I was partly sure about it.

"Yes, he has heard of the outrage, and his soldier's heart—"

"Is Monsieur Chose rehearsing his speech for the club?" my wife asked, taking my arm as we reached the courtyard; and giving me her perfumed impedimenta (including the bouquet of violets) to carry. Women can stab you and ask you to hold their shawl at the same moment.

"Ah, Felicie!" I responded (a kiss sometimes hits harder than a blow), "you cannot sympathise with all I feel at this moment. I am bleeding, inwardly, for my country."

"Then be thankful that it is inwardly, mon ami," was the reply I heard; and the "mon ami" sent the blood tingling in my ears; for it was the first time since I had cast my fishing-tackle aside that I had heard those words. Why was I not going en soirée also? I was on the point of murmuring my regret, when a sharp tug at my arm, and an exclamation to the effect that it was hardly possible to be more stupid than I was in the vital conjugal matter of getting cabs; recalled me to my hard self, and in a minute I was settling Madame Chose in a coupé.

"There, that will do: tell the driver where to go." The window was about to be drawn up in my face, when I put my hand resolutely upon it, and said:

"At least, madame, tell me what Tonnerre said, for he must have left some message: and, where I can find him."

With a movement of impatience Madame Chose replied, "Well, he said, in his mad way and your mad way too, that they had scattered the feathers of the eagle; but that every quill would be made into a pen of revenge. Make what you can out of that. Allez cocher!"

It was easy enough to translate. Tonnerre had been on the spot, and seen the old men shouldered from the temple. But why, on this account, should he leave the White Mice? Why separate himself from the friends of order, at the very moment when order was most threatened? Yesterday he was for a republic because it separated men least; and for a variety of reasons that, although they were altered, and chopped about every time the club met, were moderately good ones. To be sure his was a peculiar republic; a republic, as he cleverly expressed it, in which republicanism showed itself the least; and when it took the form of outrage upon his beloved Old Guard, he would be likely to drop it like a hot chestnut. But where should I find him? Sleep would be impossible until I had seen, and comforted my old friend. I searched at the meeting-place of the White Mice: he had not been there. I went to the café where he occasionally met his military friends. I trotted off to the establishment where we generally played our game of dominoes, and took our absinthe. No Captain Tonnerre. At last I resolved to seek him in his own rooms, by the Champs de Mars, that dusty plain being, as he expressed it, his Bois de Boulogne, lake, cascade and all.

He was at home, the concierge said; but she thought he looked very ill when he came in; and when she spoke to him he gave her no answer. I hastened to his fourth floor, and rang. I waited, but heard nobody stirring within. After a long pause I mustered courage to ring a second time. His growl and the clanking of metal thrown aside were the immediate response, followed by his heavy footsteps and his muttered anger. He threw the door wide open and roared:

"Who is it at this hour?"

"I hope, my good friend, I am not indiscreet."

He turned his back, and told me to shut the door and follow him.

It was a superb picture, perfect in every detail. I don't think Meissonnier would have altered a single accessory, or a play of light. The old soldier, his pipe in his mouth, his shirt-sleeves tucked up, an old kepi upon his head, with the peak over his ear; was giving the final touches to his accoutrements. His sword, as he fondly rubbed it, was a dancing mirror.

"Well," he grunted, without lifting his eyes, "you have heard the news, or you would not be here. Infames!"

I confessed that I had learned it with profound sorrow.

"And after?" He still polished the sword that was speckless.

"After! Is it true you have left the club?"

"Is it true that I am Captain Tonnerre?" the old man roared. "I was of the White Mice: idiot that I was. Is this the weapon to chop logic with? With their reasons and counter-reasons, their changes and counter-changes, their fine words for themselves and foul epithets for everybody else; I ought to have known I was out of place; and that their tricks would be played some day even upon the two or three braves time has left us. But to-day, Monsieur Chose, Captain Tonnerre, who is speaking to you, is of THE TIGERS!"

And Captain Tonnerre gripped the hilt of his sword with a power far from contemptible:

"We have picked up the feathers, Monsieur Chose, and these are our pen-knives."

I jumped out of the reach of the flashing sabre.

CHINESE FESTIVALS.

THE Chinese, having no hebdomadal day of rest like more highly civilised nations, pay considerable attention to holidays and festivals; for though they are so plodding and industrious in their habits, they naturally feel that the mind and body cannot endure the strain of continuous toil, but must have relaxation in some way or other. After a few prefatory remarks on their division of time, we propose to give a brief sketch of the more important of their annually-recurring festive celebrations.

The Chinese year consists of twelve months (or moons, as they are usually styled) of twenty-nine or thirty days each, but of every nineteen years seven have an extra or intercalary moon, as otherwise their calendar would get seriously out of order. Their months or moons are numbered, and have no names in daily use, though they are sometimes known by what may be called poetical names. The year is also divided into twenty-four periods or terms of about fifteen days each, some of which are known as chieh (joints), and others as chi (breaths). Each "term" has a special name of its own, one or two of which sound oddly to us, but most of them are natural enough; for example, January

21st is called Ta han (great cold); again, towards the end of March, comes Chun fen (spring divider, that is, the vernal equinox), &c. Some of these "terms" are made the occasion of holidays or festivals—such as, Li chun, or commencement of spring, Tung chih, or winter solstice, &c.

The Chinese have an elaborate almanack, published under the seal of the Astronomical Board at Peking, which regulates their festivals, and which may fairly claim to compete with the productions of Zadkiel and Old Moore; it certainly goes much more minutely into the details of every-day life than they do. On this subject Sir John Davis remarks: * "The Chinese almanack, like many others of the kind in Europe, contains predictions and advice for every day in the year, and presents the same spectacle of the abuse of a little mystical learning to impose on the ignorant majority of mankind. It even gives directions as to the most lucky days for going out or for staying at home, for shaving the head after the Tartar fashion, changing an abode, executing an agreement, or burying the dead. With this are mixed up, in the same page, a number of useful observations concerning natural phenomena pertaining to the season, though these remarks are interlarded with a number of vulgar errors as to the transformations of animals."

First and foremost among Chinese festivals and holidays is that of the new year, which happens sometimes at the end of January and sometimes in February. At this season, for two, three, or more days the shops are all shut, and work of every description is at a complete stand-still; at Peking the holiday-making is carried to such an extent that people are obliged to take the precaution of laying in a stock of provisions sufficient for a week or ten days. Crowds of people may be seen worshipping in the temples early in the morning, and during the day they are mainly occupied in visiting and congratulating one another; the Chinese call this pai nien, and tao hsi—much the same being meant as by our phrase, "A happy new year to you." The public offices are all closed, and it is of no use to attempt to prosecute thieves, &c., for petty offences, for the magistrates will take cognisance of none but extreme and serious cases. Gambling, at which the Chinese are great adepts, though it is theoretically prohibited by law, is now indulged in with great zest and publicity, and not

* The Chinese, &c., page 308. Ed. 1840.

the slightest attempt is made by the authorities to put a stop to it. The new year's festivities may be briefly summed up as comprehending sacrifices to heaven and earth; the worship of the gods of the family and of deceased ancestors; prostrations before parents; calls and congratulations, and the sending of cards and complimentary messages.

On the fifteenth day of the first moon occurs the Feast of Lanterns, called by the Chinese *Hua têng* and also *Shai têng*, which may be translated "a striving to excel in an exhibition of lanterns." A good deal of excitement is caused for some days beforehand by the crowds of people thronging the streets, especially at night, for the purpose of purchasing or staring at the lanterns, of which a goodly assortment is always on view. These lanterns are of all shapes and sizes, some being made to imitate animals; the commoner kinds are of paper, while the better and more expensive sorts are covered with gauze or fine silk, on which various fanciful objects are painted. At the Feast of Lanterns of 1862, just after the last war, ludicrous caricatures of French and English soldiers, sailors, and civilians, steamers, horses, &c., were much in vogue on the lanterns at Peking, in the neighbourhood of which Europeans in foreign garb had never before been seen. Fireworks, especially crackers, help to enliven the festive proceedings at night. In many parts of the empire married women on this day go to a temple and worship the goddess "Mother," burning incense to her, and having crackers let off in her honour, in the hope that she will grant them male offspring.

The second day of the second moon is the birthday of the Lares; plays are then performed at the public offices, and crackers and rockets are constantly being let off.

The Festival of the Tombs (*Ching ming chieh*), which commonly falls early in the third moon (April), a hundred and six days after the winter solstice, is observed all over the empire, and its date is mentioned in the imperial calendar. At this time all devout people visit the graves of their parents to *Chi-sao*, that is, to offer sacrifices of various kinds, and to put them in order. At the conclusion of the ceremonies they fix a piece of paper in the top of the hillock to show that all has been duly performed.

The eighth day of the fourth moon is celebrated as the birthday of Buddha. Many people go and gather a fragrant

herb, called *yuan hsi*, which is used as a charm against all sorts of disease.

The Festival of Dragon-boats takes place on the fifth day of the fifth moon (usually early in June). At this time races are run in long narrow boats, some forty or fifty feet in length, which are called *lung chuan* or dragon-boats, gongs being beaten all the time by a man standing up in the boat. The origin of this festival is said by some to be as follows: Many centuries ago, during the Chou dynasty (that is, about B.C. 400), a minister proposed certain reforms, which his sovereign refused to listen to; he persisted in urging his good advice, and at last got dismissed from his post. Knowing that his country was on the high road to ruin, and being unable to face this, he committed suicide by throwing himself into a river. His fellow-countrymen, with whom he was a favourite, as soon as they heard what had happened, scoured the river in all directions in small boats, well-manned, in the hope of finding his body. Tradition says that he died on the fifth day of the fifth moon, the day on which this festival has accordingly always been held.

The autumnal festival is celebrated in the eighth month, and the moon takes a leading part in it. From the first to the fifteenth people make cakes like the moon, painting figures on them; these are called *yüeh ping*, that is, moon cakes. Visits are interchanged between friends, and presents of these cakes are made. At the full moon, on the fifteenth, homage is paid to the ancestral tablets, and the family gods are worshipped; certain religious ceremonies are also performed to the moon. Tradesmen's bills are presented at this time, and if a man wishes to preserve his credit, he pays at least a portion of the amounts due.

The ninth day of the ninth moon is called *Chung yang chieh*, or *Têng kao* (that is, ascending high). At this season some go to the hills to drink and amuse themselves; others fly curious kites of extraordinary shapes, and gaudily painted; some representing Chinese goggle spectacles, others huge butterflies, others, again, fish, and indeed an infinite variety of objects. We have been told that it is customary for the holiday-makers eventually to let the kites go whither the wind listeth, as a sign that they treat all their cares in like manner!

In the eleventh moon (December), the shortest day of the year is made the occasion of a great festival. All officials are then expected to go to the imperial

hall (Wan shou ching) in the provincial capital and make their prostrations to the winter solstice. They also perform the three kneelings and nine knockings of the head on the ground (ko-ton) before the emperor's tablet, which is placed at the back of the temple, and congratulate him on the arrival of the winter solstice; at Peking the high officials do the same before the emperor himself, or before a yellow screen, which is supposed to represent him. On this day the emperor usually performs certain sacrificial rites in the Altar of Heaven. Entertainments are given by the officials in honour of the day, and the populace also chiefly observe the holiday by feasting.

After the middle of the twelfth moon various preparations for holiday-making commence, and on the twentieth an event occurs which is a very important one in all the public offices, namely, fêng yin, or the shutting up of the seal of office for a whole month, which is equivalent to a holiday for the same period. To make this quite intelligible to an English reader, we must remark that all public documents in China, including despatches, proclamations, warrants, &c., bear, not the signature of the official issuing them, but the impression of his seal of office in vermilion. As very important business, however, must be attended to, even during a holiday season, it is customary to stamp a certain number of blank sheets of paper before the seal is shut up, so that despatches, &c., can be written in due form, should cases of emergency arise. One of the chief clerks takes the seal and places it in his box, which is then locked up, and two strips of paper, stamped with the seal and bearing the date and name of the office, are next pasted over the box crosswise, thus, as it were, sealing it up. These fastenings are removed and the seal taken out on the twentieth day of the first moon of the new year, when the ordinary business routine of the office is resumed.

On the evening of the twenty-fourth of the last moon every family worships Tsao Shên, the god of the oven or kitchen fire, thanking him for his past kindness and care. On the evening of the thirtieth all let off crackers, and so see the old year out. Sacrifices and wine are offered to the deities, and all then partake of a meal; this is called tuan nien, that is, rounding off the year. Many sit up all night and shou sui, that is, watch for the year; and the Chinese have an old saw, that "he who can watch for the year will obtain long life."

One more festival remains to be noticed,

which is held in great honour among the Chinese, and shows how highly they esteem agriculture; but as it sometimes happens at the end of their year, and sometimes at the beginning, we have thought it better to speak of it last. This holiday or festival occurs at the Li Chun term or period, when the sun is in fifteen degrees of Aquarius (February 5th), and continues for ten days, to each of which a different name is applied, namely, fowl, dog, pig, sheep, cow, horse, man, grain, hemp, and pea; the seventh, or man-day, is the greatest. A large image of a buffalo, called the Chun niu, or spring buffalo, is made of clay at the public expense, and on the day before the chief one of the festival, the prefect goes out of the east gate of the city with much ceremony to "meet spring," which is represented by this figure, and also the image of a man in clay, called Tai sui, in allusion to the year of the cycle. He then makes certain offerings, prostrating himself before them. In the procession are numbers of children (called Chun sê), who are decked out with great care by the people and placed on tables, which are carried about the streets on men's shoulders. On the next day the same official appears as the priest of spring, and in that capacity he holds the highest rank for the time being, those who are really his superiors in office being then supposed to make way for him, if they chance to encounter him in his progress. Having delivered an address, eulogising agricultural pursuits, he strikes the clay figures with a whip two or three times, and they are then pelted with stones by the populace and broken in pieces, which is thought to be an omen of a good harvest. A writer on China has remarked that "this ceremony bears some resemblance to the procession of the bull Apis in ancient Egypt, which was connected in like manner with the labours of agriculture and the hopes of an abundant season."

NO ALTERNATIVE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DENIS DONNE," &c.

CHAPTER II. FRIENDS THAT HAD BEEN LONG ESTRANGED.

MRS. GREYLING was reaping her reward!

She had gone to a vast expense this day in order to do due honour to the queen of the Court. She had bothered and beguiled her husband into the folly of hiring a horse for the day to put into his dog-cart, that so she might be enabled to have

"the pair" for her little brougham. She had trimmed her daughters' white muslin dresses with lace of price, because she had once heard Mrs. Powers hold forth on the subject of real lace in connexion with well-bred women's dresses, in a way that made her shiver to the soul as she reflected that she had been "short-sighted enough" to induct herself and her offspring into "mere machine-made" on various occasions. She had bonneted, and gloved, and booted them to the best of her ability, and quite regardless of cost. She had put her husband into a vile temper by the energy and whole-heartedness she had displayed in doing all these things. And now she was reaping her reward!

Her daughters were sent home with the glad tidings that "Mrs. Powers was keeping mamma to dine and spend the evening with her alone."

The garden-party had been very much like every other garden-party. People had met, and distrusted each other's claims to be there; had drank tea and coffee, admired the conservatories, and knocked croquet balls about. But through all these conventional preliminaries, Mrs. Greyling had been patiently hopeful of better things. For had not Mrs. Powers said to her at the onset:

"You must wait here till the other people are gone, and then you must send your girls home, and stay and dine with me, and tell me about the people who have taken the house at the corner."

Had not the acting lady of the land said this, and, from the moment of her saying it, was not Mrs. Greyling's heart at rest? She had nothing in common with the great majority of Mrs. Powers's friends, for these were either London or county people, who had their own set of allusions, interests, and topics. But what did it matter to this gallant woman that, in every little conversational effort that was made, it was manifested to her, if she struggled to join in it, that her contributions would not be thankfully received? She still had it in her power to go back to Dillsborough and say she "had spent a delightful hour or two with the rest of the company, and a still more delightful time alone with dear Mrs. Powers." Verily she was having her reward!

She was dining now under the auspices of a butler and a couple of footmen—dining, with the sure conviction that her hostess and fellow-labourer at the repast was not at all hungry, and not at all inclined to dally idly through the hour for the sole purpose of gratifying her visitor's appetite.

Mrs. Powers was thoroughly determined upon redeeming the time—and she made her determination manifest with the first spoonful of soup which she sipped.

"I suppose you can tell me all about them?" she commenced. "Devenish is not a common name, and there was a Devenish in my nephew's regiment; one would like to know if one ought to know them."

Mrs. Powers was a delightful woman in society—a sharp, clever, amusing woman of the world, full of anecdote, an excellent listener, and altogether sufficiently popular, plausible, and polished to make her a power in her own set. But to those who cast themselves before her chariot-wheels she was very ruthless in a domineering friendly kind of way, and she was occasionally very ruthless indeed to her faithful Mrs. Greyling.

"Thinking you might like to hear a little about them, I called just before I came here to-day," Mrs. Greyling answered, beaming with delight at having anticipated the great lady's wishes on the subject. "I should not have called so soon, having a great objection to rushing into intimacies, only as I said to Doctor Greyling—"

"Never mind what you said to Doctor Greyling," Mrs. Powers interrupted. Then she went on suavely: "I am very anxious to hear what impression these new people made upon you?"

"I should say they were not too well off," Mrs. Greyling responded, shaking her head; "the house, so much of it as I saw, looked nice, but I noticed a good many makeshifts." And then Mrs. Greyling relieved her mind about the "plain muslin curtains," and added a crushing statement to the effect that they "were coarse, quite coarse; the only thing that could be said in their favour was that they were clean."

"And that's everything," Mrs. Powers responded, overpoweringly. "I don't want to hear about their furniture, or whether they're rich or poor; I want to know if they're gentlepeople."

"It's so difficult to say," Mrs. Greyling murmured, sweetly.

She did wish, above all things, to avoid being definite about the Devenishes just at first. The longer she could keep up an air of doubt about them, the longer would Mrs. Powers's curiosity crave for her society, and the longer would Dillsborough suffer pangs of envy at the honour that was done her in being so sought and so distinguished by the queen of the Court.

"It's so difficult to say," she repeated, with a contemplative expression.

"I have no doubt that you find it difficult," Mrs. Powers said, dryly; "but if you can describe them, perhaps I shall be able to judge."

"Well, I should think they had seen better days," Mrs. Greyling began, nervously taxing her descriptive powers, which were not strong. "They were all neat; yes, I should decidedly say they were all neat, except the youngest girl's hair; but there was a worn look about all their dresses, and Mr. Devenish was wrapped up in a shabby old military cloak——"

"I don't want to hear about their clothes, but of their minds and manners, if they have any."

"Oh, they've very little manner—very little manner, any of them!" Mrs. Greyling exclaimed, hurriedly. Her task was becoming rather more difficult than she had believed it would be. "They all have a cool kind of way, as if they were rather careless and indifferent about you, you know——"

"They may well be; they don't know me," Mrs. Powers laughed.

"Oh, I don't mean about you individually, but about every one; they didn't ask me a single question about the place or the people, though I led up to the subject several times."

"Evidently they're free from vulgar curiosity; that sounds well," old Mrs. Powers said, approvingly. Woman-like, she was ready to condemn the quality she herself was displaying. "Are the daughters pretty?"

"One is pleasing-looking—yes, I should certainly call the eldest pleasing-looking; the second girl might look pretty at times, I dare say, but she's one of those persons whose looks you can't rely on; it's a very variable face. I don't admire the style myself; give me features."

"Where have they come from?"

"I couldn't find out, though I gave more than one hint; but when they call on me I shall ask them."

"I shall call on them to-morrow," Mrs. Powers said, magnificently—"yes, to-morrow will suit me very well; will you ask your good kind husband to let me have his carriage to-morrow at two?"

Mrs. Powers was rigidly economical in the country. In London, during the season, she kept a charming little brougham. But when she was at the Court, Doctor Greyling's carriage was "good enough for her," as she was kind enough to observe. Perhaps if she had known what anguish of mind poor Mrs. Greyling endured each time that she

was called upon to negotiate the loan, Christian charity would have induced her (Mrs. Powers) to borrow it less frequently.

"I am sure Doctor Greyling will be delighted," Mrs. Greyling gasped.

Poor woman! she was wincing already under the bitter sneers that would be dealt out freely to her when she went home, and was asked for the price of the honour that she had this day enjoyed. She was shrinking inwardly from the thought of the weary time she would have of it to-morrow when she would be obliged again to offer the suggestion that Doctor Greyling should hire a horse for the dog-cart, and send his own handsome well-bred pair over to the Court to do dutiful service for Mrs. Powers.

But what matters a little domestic discord more or less, when such interests are at stake socially? What matters the sharpest heart-pangs so long as they are concealed? Mrs. Powers never knew what her humble patient friend suffered in the cause of lending the carriage. Therefore she went on borrowing it in blithe unconsciousness whenever she wanted it—which was very often.

But patient and forbearing as Mrs. Greyling was, she still made gallant struggles to get at least part payment for that which she endured. Her friendship with Mrs. Powers would seem a sham, a hollow mockery, an idle thing indeed, if she could not go back to Dillsborough with late and voluminous information concerning the absent master of the Court—that Claude Powers, whose life had been a long romance to the people of his own land, so little did they know of him. Therefore, when she had promised to lend the carriage, and drained the cup of bitterness to the dregs, she turned to the topic of the absentee with the feeling that there was balm in Gilead still.

"I hope you have had good accounts of Mr. Powers lately?" she began, insinuatingly.

"Of my nephew Claude? Yes, very good accounts indeed; the very best, according to my idea. The 'king will soon have his own again; he's coming home to settle.'"

"And marry?" Mrs. Greyling meekly suggested.

"That too, I suppose, by-and-bye; young men do marry, though why they do I don't know; I hope Claude won't impudently surrender his liberty to the first girl who makes love to him."

"I am sure I echo your hope," Mrs. Greyling said, with virtuous horror and

disgust; "it is woman's place to be sought; the forward manners of some young girls of the present day petrify me—absolutely petrify me."

"They don't petrify me at all, for they're only like the girls of the past, and the girls of the future will very probably closely resemble them; human nature does not alter very much in a generation or two; either the mothers go to market for the girls, or the girls go to market for themselves."

"I am sure I can conscientiously say that the longer I can keep my girls with me the better I shall be pleased," Mrs. Greyling answered, with a heightened colour.

Her hopes about the coming Claude were high. Was it possible that Mrs. Powers could have discerned them, carefully concealed as they were?

"Yours are very nice girls, and they'll make very nice wives; I was not thinking of them when I spoke," Mrs. Powers said, good-naturedly. "But Claude will have to run the gauntlet in quite another sphere to Dillsborough society, and, as I said before, I hope he won't surrender to the first girl who makes love to him; he has a charming nature, but it's one to lead him astray."

"He used to be a delightful boy," Mrs. Greyling said, with effusion. "It's so long since I have seen him, he will find me grown quite an old woman; when do you expect him home?"

"About the end of July."

"And we shall not lose you when we gain him, I trust?"

Mrs. Greyling asked it so fervently, that Mrs. Powers could but feel convinced that her friend was panting for the day to come when farewells for ever should be exchanged between them. This conviction imparted additional suavity to her reply.

"Oh, no; my nephew and I have settled that. I am to remain here—he says for ever, I say until he marries. Must you be going now? Remember the carriage at two to-morrow, and my kindest regards to your excellent husband."

"Well I have got some certain information about Claude, that's a comfort," Mrs. Greyling said to her three daughters that night. "He's not engaged at present, and he's coming home in July. I'm glad I stayed, if it was only to hear that; but what I shall have to go through with your father when I tell him that I have promised to send the carriage for her at two, I don't know."

"Anything duller than her detestable garden-party to-day, I can't conceive in my most dismal moments," Miss Greyling remarked, discontentedly. "I'm sure for all we endure at her hands down here, she ought to ask us up to visit her in town sometimes."

"Well, well, it will all be different when Claude comes home. Be thankful that we are on the familiar footing we are at the Court; I know that it causes a good deal of ill-feeling towards us in this place, but we can't please everybody. I have done a friendly thing to the Devenishes—persuaded Mrs. Powers to call on them; it will put them in a good position at once."

The soothing and comforting reflection that she had done this good thing, supported and carried Mrs. Greyling through the appalling ordeal of arranging that matter of lending the carriage to her patroness. However, that she negotiated the loan with consummate skill, may be gathered from the fact of the carriage being at the door of the Court at two o'clock precisely the following day.

Already was life at Dillsborough allowing itself to appear as the wearisome thing it was to those new-comers in the house at the corner. Town mice cannot take up the manners and interests of country mice at a moment's notice, and these special town mice had not even attempted a course of preliminary education. Given certain conditions, and the country is very desirable and delicious; withdraw these conditions and it becomes detestable—a howling wilderness at once.

Each one of the family felt the change from the easy, unobserved life they had led, to this one of being undesirably prominent and thought about. That they owed this dubious honour to nothing good in themselves, but merely to the curiosity of their neighbours, was a fact that did not lessen the burden in the least degree. They had to bear it. They had to bear the knowledge that speculation and suspicion were rife about them. And within themselves they had the chilling consciousness of inability to set them at rest.

A day at the house at the corner was not a thing to be marked with a white stone about this time. Mrs. Devenish and Mabel threw any quantity of moral oil on the troubled waters of their daily life, but the waters were not quieted thereby. The two dominant spirits of that household—Harty Carlisle and her step-father, Mr. Devenish—were not at peace with one another, and whatever the cause of the feud, it was

full of vitality. It came to the fore on every occasion, and made the path of the wife and mother a thorny one.

For she loved each of these antagonists so well. They were almost equally dear to her, although the slavish element in her essentially feminine nature made her render up the tribute of a fuller outwardly affectionate observance to her lord and master, Mr. Devenish. But though she did this, and though she scolded Harty daily, and wept over her delinquencies nightly, this wilful winsome child of hers was very dear to her.

Harty was doubly dear to her mother. She was dear for the sorrow she had caused, and for the sorrow she had suffered. Mrs. Devenish passed the whole of her time in either deprecating harsh feeling towards Harty, or in developing pity for the girl. As Harty herself worded it, "Mamma is always either apologising for my existence, or offering me the martyr's crown." And either extreme was irksome to one who only sighed for sufferance, who only asked to be let alone.

Harty Carlisle, some three or four years ago, had been on the topmost round of the feminine ladder of success. She had been for a brief time the object of envy to every other girl in the garrison town in which the —th were quartered, for she was engaged to be married to the best-liked, the wealthiest, and the handsomest man in the regiment. Suddenly the calamity to which Mr. Devenish made reference in the course of his conversation with his wife and daughters, overtook him, and "how it happened" no one knew but the girl herself. But her marriage scheme was abruptly demolished, and Claude Powers left the service.

Various reports about the affair were current, but the Devenishes and their daughters did not wait to hear many of them. The most popular version of the cause of the rupture was, that "Powers had jilted the girl, and very properly too, as her step-father was such a bad egg." Harty knew that this was said, and never, by word or sign, did she attempt to contradict it. But Claude and herself, of all the world, were the only ones who knew how and why they had parted, and whose had been the severing hand.

Even to her mother Harty offered no explanation when the crisis came. Mrs. Devenish was busying herself about the trousseau one morning, wishing that Harty would decide as to the texture and particular white of the wedding dress, when

Harty came quietly in and stood by her mother's shoulder, and said:

"Claude Powers has sent his good-bye to you, mamma, through me; he won't be able to see you before he goes."

"His good-bye before he goes," Mrs. Devenish repeated, in utter bewilderment.

"Yes; this won't be wanted," Harty went on, putting her hand on the patterns of wedding silks.

"Oh, Harty, Harty, tell me, tell me," Mrs. Devenish asked, dissolving into tears of bitter disappointment and helpless misery. And then Harty told her all that she could ever be got to tell any one.

"We are not going to be married, mamma, and he has gone away; that is all."

"No, no, it isn't all. Harty, is your heart broken, or didn't you love him, that you take it so gently? Oh, I don't understand my own child!"

"My heart isn't broken. As to the other thing, we needn't talk about that, as I'm not going to marry him."

"It will be a blight on your whole life," Mrs. Devenish moaned; "as if we had not had misery and misfortune enough without Claude adding to it."

"Claude hasn't added to it," Harty said imperiously; "Claude could only do what he has done; he had no alternative. I won't hear Claude blamed; and I don't mean my life to be blighted."

"You'll never love any one else as you have loved Claude, Harty; I know it. How could he give up such love as yours for false pride, for that is what it is, I feel sure, though you won't tell me; how could he?"

"Don't!" Harty cried, with a sudden stamp of her foot. "I tell you he could only do as he has done, and I won't hear him blamed; it's my affair altogether; no one else has anything to do with it."

"This will add bitterly to poor Edward's heavy trials," Mrs. Devenish sighed, and Harty could not check the contemptuous smile which flashed over her face as she answered:

"Don't put it before me in that light, pray, mamma. Papa will be sorry that the marriage is broken off, because it was a good match; but that will be all."

"Oh, Harty, Harty, you don't do justice to his sensitive nature," Mrs. Devenish pleaded. "I know that it will be a heavy trial to him, and I dread the effect the news will have on him. I shrink from breaking it to him; I dread my task."

"I'll break it to him, and that directly,"

Harty cried; and without any hesitation she went in search of Mr. Devenish, who was, as usual, wrapped in his old military cloak and melancholy reflections.

"Papa, I have come to tell you that Claude Powers and I are not going to be married," she said. "He has gone away."

Then had ensued a scene of recrimination and bitter bewailings that had been very ghastly to the girl. In vain she tried to avert the stream of self-pitying talk which Mr. Devenish poured upon her devoted head. She struggled with her own imperious nature, and refrained from giving wrathful answers, until he said:

"It's a cowardly thing to strike such a blow at a man in my position; a cruel and a cowardly thing, and I'll call him to account for it."

"If you ever speak to Claude Powers about—about our parting, I'll leave your house," she stormed out; "haven't we all suffered enough for you, that you must contemplate doing me this shameful wrong? To think of going to Claude, and trying to make him despise me; let me keep his respect, for Heaven's sake, even if I must lose his love."

The only sentence in her passionate plaint that made an impression on him was that one, "haven't we all suffered enough for you." That rang in his ears, and rankled in his mind, and from that day Mr. Devenish cordially disliked and distrusted his step-daughter.

But she carried her point successfully. Never a question was asked of Claude by any one member of her family relative to that abruptly broken engagement. Where he went no one knew; he passed completely out of their lives, and it seemed to them that they had done with him for ever. Whether the girl suffered much or suffered at all, was a problem to them, a problem which Harty never permitted them to solve. When they moved from the place which had witnessed the birth and death of her romance, she flung herself into the new life with a fervour that looked like forgetfulness. Whether it was or not remains to be seen.

"I never expected her to feel it much," Mr. Devenish would say, shrugging his shoulders. "I have had too full an experience of the ease with which she can give pain to expect anything like a tender regretfulness from her: but I didn't know that she was quite so shallow in feeling; she's ready to flirt with any fellow."

"Oh, papa, she meets so few people now," Mabel would plead in vindication of

her sister's manner, which was unquestionably always more vivacious and attractive when men were present, than when she was in the society of her own sex; "she's young, and it would be hard for her never to care for any one else; though I don't think she ever can find any one who can make her forget Claude."

"She's ready enough to flirt with any fellow," Mr. Devenish would say, querulously; "it will end, I see plainly, in her not marrying at all; we shall always have her on our hands."

In her illogical affectionate heart Mabel was very much inclined to pity her step-father for having the "burden of the maintenance of herself and her sister cast upon him." Not that he had anything of the sort. Mr. Devenish's share of the income on which they lived was utterly insufficient for his own wants. But then, as Mabel argued, "If mamma hadn't us there would be more for poor papa; and I'm sure he wants all he can have to make up for all he has suffered."

It was a great shock to the family mind, this news which Mrs. Greyling had given them about Claude Powers. They were not left long in doubt as to his being the Claude Powers who had figured so largely on the canvas of Harty's life. The day after Mrs. Greyling's visit, Mrs. Powers came to call on them, and almost her first words killed the frail hope they had entertained that he might not be the real Claude.

"There was a Devenish in my nephew's regiment, the —th," she said, cordially. And at the remark Mr. Devenish sighed heavily, and Mrs. Devenish put in hurriedly:

"Yes, we knew something of Mr. Powers; but my husband left the regiment some time before Mr. Powers sold out."

Mrs. Powers betrayed just the proper amount of courteous interest in this statement and nothing more. It was clear to the keen-visioned old lady that the subject was embarrassing to them, therefore she turned lightly away from it. She registered a vow on the spot to unravel the mystery if there was one, to discover that, whatever it was which these people seemed to desire to conceal. But she was a gentlewoman, and so she would not go grossly and coarsely about her self-imposed work. She would not investigate their case and hurt their feelings before their faces! She would know all about them, and collect all the threads of their story, however

blown abroad these might be. But she would do it in her own good time, and they should not be hurt or mortified by her at any rate in the process.

So she resolved as she sat in the little drawing-room in which on every side she detected marks of the tastes of refined women, and in which Mrs. Greyling had failed to see anything save the harsh marks of poverty. And all the time they were liking her, and being drawn to her by the irresistible influence of class sympathy. She resembled the traditions of their former life, of the life they had lived before Mr. Devenish's "misfortunes" turned the social tide against them, more closely than anything else they had seen in Dillsborough.

And some subtle element from the old romance—from the dead and done with romance—breathed its spirit into Harty, and charged her with the power and the will to be at her best before this old lady, who would probably ignore their existence as soon as her nephew came home and enlightened her. And Harty's best was a very bewitching thing.

"What did you mean by telling me that the youngest girl 'might look pretty at times?' She can look beautiful at times, and wonderfully attractive always, I should say, with that pliant figure and brilliant face. I like her; I like the vigour she throws into a word when she's interested, and the careless grace with which she turns from a person, or a topic, when she is indifferent; the other girl is an amiable, pretty, common-place creature, who has never given any one connected with her a pang, or a doubt, I should say; but the little dark one has the rare gift."

"What rare gift?" Mrs. Greyling asked, puzzled. "I can't see it."

"No, no, none of you can; it's fascination; not one woman in a hundred—not one woman in a thousand—has it, and when they have, they generally make themselves and their friends wretched. I'm sorry Claude is coming home."

"Mr. Powers will see so many beautiful women in London," Mrs. Greyling cooed, reassuringly, "that he is not likely to see very much in this young lady."

"Most men will see whatever she chooses they shall see in her," Mrs. Powers replied, emphatically; "I can see that."

The sea was like a lake that day. There

was not a breath of wind to stir the surface of the water, as the steamer ploughed her way across from Calais to Dover. On the deck two young men were lounging, lazily smoking, and languidly speaking to one another, now and again, but chiefly enjoying the warmth and the stillness.

"I can't get up any enthusiasm about the white cliffs, though I haven't seen them for some years; can you, Claude?" the younger man asked between the slow puffs he was giving at his cigar.

The man he addressed stretched himself out on his back, pulled his hat over his eyes, and laughed.

"I've had home sickness, though, a good deal, Jack; in dreams, both waking and sleeping, I've seen the old land,

"And in the dim blue distance
A strip of green there shone,
That green strip was a country,
That country was my own."

"Nor knew I till this vision
Had come into my heart,
Thou dear far land, how very dear
And very far thou art."

"Hah!" Jack Ferrier exclaimed by way of answer. Then after a pause of a few moments he added, "Dear enough in all conscience, unless prices have dropped considerably during our absence; but not so very far—half an hour longer will see us there."

They got up and went over and leant on the side of the boat, showing themselves to be two well-grown, good-looking men. At the first glance, the more stalwart figure and handsomer face of Mr. Ferrier led the eyes off his companion; but there was something about Claude Powers, the memory of which more than one woman had found to her cost, that "you couldn't get away from." It was not beauty only, and it was not power only; probably it was the subtle combination of the two. There was power enough in the broad brow, and earnest eyes, and there was great beauty, a most rare refinement in the chin and mouth, that were modelled delicately as a woman's. The inflections of his voice, too, were haunting, softly clear and sweet, and desperately passionate. Mr. Devenish had made many mistakes in life, but never a greater one than when he imagined that Harty had entirely forgotten Claude Powers.

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